

## The Sufficiency of Christ – More Than Enough

Religious people in modern American have what some call a “cafeteria religion.” Belief in Christ is usually the main entre but there are also many side dishes, a big helping of psychology, maybe a little eastern spiritualism, just a sprinkle of astrology and all of it covered in a rich sauce of “positive thinking.” In many ways it’s not too different than in the ancient world. People would sacrifice to many different gods so as not to make any particular god mad. I remember hearing a Vietnam vet share about his spiritual experience. He said when he was fighting and surrounded by the enemy he wore a cross, a star of David, a yin and yang, the star and the crescent, several amulets and charms. He said, “I believe Man! I just believe!”

When Paul writes to the Colossians, his concern is not that believers will leave Christianity and join another religion, but that believers would mix their Christianity with other religions. Christ centered doesn’t mean Christ in the center of many other religious ideas and philosophies; it means Christ alone from the center to the very periphery of our life. Paul writes the Colossians to make it clear what Christianity is, and what it isn’t. He begins by establishing the supremacy of Christ. He is not one god among many. He is the image of the one and only God. He is not a created being but the creator of all beings. In our passage today Paul details the many different religious ideas and influences that concerned Paul.

*So then, just as you received Christ Jesus as Lord, continue to live your lives in him, rooted and built up in him, strengthened in the faith as you were taught, and overflowing with thankfulness. See to it that no one takes you captive through hollow and deceptive philosophy, which depends on human tradition and the elemental spiritual forces of this world rather than on Christ. For in Christ all the fullness of the Deity lives in bodily form, and in Christ you have been brought to fullness. He is the head over every power and authority. In him you were also circumcised with a circumcision not performed by human hands. Your whole self ruled by the flesh was put off when you were circumcised by Christ, having been buried with him in baptism, in which you were also raised with him through your faith in the working of God, who raised him from the dead.*

*When you were dead in your sins and in the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made you alive with Christ. He forgave us all our sins, having canceled the charge of our legal indebtedness, which stood against us and condemned us; he has taken it away, nailing it to the cross. And having disarmed the powers and authorities, he made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross. Therefore do not let anyone judge you by what you eat or drink, or with regard to a religious festival, a New Moon celebration or a Sabbath day. These are a shadow of the things that were to come; the reality, however, is found in Christ.*

*Do not let anyone who delights in false humility and the worship of angels disqualify you. Such a person also goes into great detail about what they have seen; they are puffed up with idle notions by their unspiritual mind. They have lost connection with the head, from whom the whole body, supported and held together by its ligaments and sinews, grows as God causes it to grow. Since you died with Christ to the elemental spiritual forces of this world, why, as though you still belonged to the world, do you submit to its rules: “Do not handle! Do not taste! Do not touch!”? These rules, which have to do with things that are all destined to perish with use, are based on merely human commands and teachings. Such regulations indeed have an appearance of wisdom, with their self-imposed worship, their false humility and their harsh treatment of the body, but they lack any value in restraining sensual indulgence (Colossians 2: 6-23).*

So much here we could talk about. But let me summarize the problem. The Colossians were being told they needed something more than Christ alone to be saved, that Christ alone was not sufficient for their salvation. And so they were adding things to the gospel of Jesus Christ: philosophy based on the basic principles of this world; various religious rules and laws like circumcision, dietary restrictions and observing certain holy days; the practice of asceticism which is the harsh treatment of body to make people “holier”; the worship of spiritual powers, angels and experiencing mystical visions. These are not uncommon practices in

religions. In fact, this is the typical understanding of religion, various things we can do to save ourselves, to make ourselves more holy, more enlightened, more spiritual, more whatever it is a particular religion teaches that we should be. Being religious is a default program in humans. It is natural for us to supplement faith in Christ with some religious entre to make our religious meal better, fuller.

But Paul warns the Colossian Christians not to listen to anyone who says Christ and a transforming relationship with Christ is not enough. He says it in different ways. Christ has rescued you, don't be taken captive again. Christ has forgiven you by his grace, don't let anyone judge or disqualify you by demanding you submit to their rules. Every spiritual advantage promised by these things you already have in Christ. Paul is teaching the doctrine of the sufficiency of Christ.

The definition of sufficient is simple: enough. If something is sufficient that means it is all that is needed. Christ is sufficient for our salvation. Nothing less than Christ is of any eternal value. Nothing more than Christ adds any eternal value. There are many things we may do because of our relationship with Christ: we fast and pray, we serve others, we give, we read Scripture, we share our faith with others but none of these things are done to be saved, they are done because we have been saved. To place our faith in Christ means we know we cannot save ourselves, not by attaining great knowledge or learning secret wisdom, not by treating our bodies harshly, not by practicing religious rituals and ceremonies, not

by doing good deeds, not by trying to appeal to spiritual powers or angels. These are the kind of things man does to save himself, to climb up a ladder to heaven. The gospel could not be more different. The gospel is not about our climbing up any ladders but it is good news that God has climbed down to earth, climbed up on a cross and saved us.

Years ago Roy Osborne spoke here. He told about preaching one evening with the highly regarded K. C. Moser in the audience. Moser was a preacher among Churches of Christ who preached a gospel of grace in a time of legalism. Osborne had developed his own illustrations that emphasized grace. One was a story of a man drowning in a lake. A drowning man doesn't need someone to throw him a book of instructions on how to swim. He needs someone to come along side him and throw him a rope to climb in. At the end of the service Roy asked brother Moser what he thought of his lesson. Moser said he liked it but he had one problem. "Dead men don't climb."

That is actually what baptism means. Baptism is not a rope we climb to get into salvation; baptism is a confession of faith that we are dead and if we are to be saved it will be Christ and Christ alone who saves us. That's why Paul describes baptism as a death and a burial. Baptism is more than washing away our sins; it is putting to death any idea that we can clean ourselves up. In baptism we die and are buried and then, from that watery grave, God raises us to live again, yet, as Paul

says, “not I but Christ lives in me.” To be baptised into Christ is to say to all the world, “I trust in Christ alone to be saved.” He is sufficient.

But in Colossae some were saying that faith in Christ was only part of the formula. We need to add to Christ faith in these other beliefs, practices and/or traditions to enhance or assure our salvation. Here is the problem with adding anything to Christ. Christ did not say I am part of the way. He did not say I am most of the way. He did not say I am the best way. He said, “I am the Way.” Following Jesus is not like hitchhiking. “Mister, how far are you going? How far down the road can you get me?” Following Jesus is not like flying Southwest, flying only so far and then having to change planes. Christ is sufficient, he is non-stop, he’ll get you all the way to where your going. Peter puts it this way, *His divine power has given us everything we need for life and godliness.* Paul tells the Philippians, *My God will supply all your needs according to his riches in Christ.*

Paul tells the Colossian church, “You can’t get more full than fullness of Christ.” *For in Christ all the fullness of the Deity lives in bodily form and you have been given fullness in Christ who is the head over every power and authority (vs 9-10).* If there is something missing in your Christianity, it is Christ. If your spiritual life seems less than it should be, you don’t need more law. you don’t need more visions, you don’t need more knowledge, you don’t need more angels. What you need more of is Christ. Deepen your relationship with him. He is sufficient.

Paul says, “You can’t get more power than the power of Christ.” Christ is the internal circumcision. In verse 11 Paul writes, *In him (Christ) you were circumcised with a circumcision not performed by human hands. Your whole self ruled by the flesh was put off when you were circumcised by Christ.* In other words Paul is saying real power comes by changing the inside of a person, not the outside. Forget external circumcision which only cuts off skin, in Christ there is power to cut off the sinful nature and transform the whole person, body and spirit. Remember, before you found Christ you were dead, your sins had condemned you, you were at the mercy of the powers of this world. But when you were baptized you placed your faith in the power of Jesus Christ and now he has entered inside of you to change you. Paul describes the work he does, the life he lives is possible only because of *the energy Christ so powerfully works in me (1:29)*. The Amplified Bible says the *superhuman energy which He so mightily works within me*.

In verse 16-17 Paul says, “You can’t get more real than the reality of Christ.” *Therefore do not let anyone judge you by what you eat or drink, or with regard to a religious festival, a new moon celebration or a Sabbath day. These are a shadow of the things that were to come, the reality however is found in Christ.* All religious practices and ceremonies are only a shadow of the reality. Offering sacrifices, eating special foods, observing holy days all speak to a need to make right something that is wrong in us. Even the religious rituals and ceremonies of the

Law of Moses given to the Jews by God himself. In Hebrews 10:1 we are told that *the Law was but a shadow of the reality which was to come in Christ*. And yet there is a temptation in us to worship our religion, to think we are saved by how well we do our religion, observing rituals, holy days, doing “spiritual things.” But all these things are given to us to lead us to something better, someone better. Paul told the Galatians the law was not given to save us but to guide us to a Savior. It is a tragedy to gaze upon the law and be blind to the lawgiver; to embrace holy words and never feel the embrace of the Word of God made flesh. Jesus himself warned against this. He said to some very religious Pharisees, *You diligently study the Scriptures because you think by them you will find possess eternal life. These are the Scriptures that testify about me, yet you refuse to come to me to have life* (John 5:39). Later John would write in his letters, *Whoever has the Son has life; whoever does not have the Son of God does not have life* (1 John 5:12). Christ is the reality.

Finally Paul says, “You can’t get more humble than the humility of Christ.” Paul writes, *Do not let anyone who delights in false humility and the worship of angels disqualify you for the prize. Such a person goes into great detail about what he has seen, and his unspiritual mind puffs him up with idle notions. He has lost connection with the Head, from whom the whole body, supported and held together by its ligaments and sinews, grows as God causes it to grow*. Some felt that salvation was all about transcending this world, ascending into the heavens and

sitting among the angels. Paul said this kind of religion is false humility and it leads to being puffed up. All that talk about ascending into a realm and being surrounded by greater beings is done to make people feel greater themselves.

The truth is greatness does not come from ascending but from descending. We could never have known God if he had not descended. And by descending he gave us the ultimate example of how to be great. Paul wrote to the Philippians that *Christ who being in nature God did not consider equality with God something to be grasped but made himself nothing, taking the nature of a servant he humbled himself...Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name* (Philippians 2:6). You can't get more humble than Christ.

Here is the bottom line. Adding to Christ moves the focus of faith away from Christ and toward us. When we focus on our self we compare ourselves, our holiness, our performance, our understandings, our whatever. These things replace Christ at the center of our faith. We decapitate the Body, exalt the parts and turn the Body of Christ into piles of body parts. Believers divide themselves from one another and huddle together in separate groups. In one corner the philosophical believers, another corner the good works believers, on another spirit filled believers and across the street, separated from all others, are the correct believers.

By adding to Christ we end up validating Christ by the values of the world. In a materialistic world we validate Christ because he will lead us to prosperity and

wealth. In a sensual world we validate Christ because he will give us an emotional experience. In a success oriented world we validate Christ because he will make us more successful. In a family oriented world we validate Christ because he keeps our families together. In an individualistic culture we validate Christ as a personal Savior who does not ask us to be accountable to a Church community. In each case we transform Christ into a Lord centered on meeting our needs rather than be transformed into Christ-centered people. The same thing happens in movements that emerge to correct the Church.

I've seen several "movements" that seek to address a perceived inadequacy of the church. I remember as a young man going to positive Christian retreats and learning the "positive Christian" message that corrected an overly negative church with the positive principles gleaned from sales and marketing. Later the quasi-mystical "charismatic" movement emerged to correct an overly rational Christianity. The "unity movement" corrected a terribly divided church. The "discipling movement" corrected a lack of evangelism among Christians. The "church growth" and "mega-church" movements made corrections to assist the transition from the rural church to the city church. The "worship renewal" movement sought to correct the overly techno/performance-oriented services which were the inevitable by-product of the mega churches. In response to "mega" Christianity we have seen a growing preference for the ancient, "simple church."

These movements are sincere attempts to meet some need we feel isn't being met by our experience of faith and church. But if anything is missing in our faith it is best found by filling the center of our faith with more of Christ.

But doesn't Christ want to meet our needs? Isn't that why we follow Christ to be fulfilled? No, unless what you want to be filled more full of is Christ. If Christ alone is not sufficient, then we are not Christ-centered disciples, we are Christ-plus disciples. Following Christ is not about satisfying our need to be successful, be emotional, be positive, or any of the unending lists of needs we may believe we have. Following Christ is not about satisfying all our needs. It is about being satisfied that our only need is to follow Christ. In fact, following Christ may mean many of your needs will not be met. Following Christ may cause you to lose everything, ask Paul.

The Kingdom Christ has translated us to needs patriots not mercenaries. You know the difference. They wear the same uniform, are issued the same equipment, fight under the same flag. From the outside one can't tell any difference. But inside everything is different. The mercenary will fight as long as he gets what he needs, as long as he knows he will not lose. But, if the battle is lost, the supplies don't arrive, the mercenary is out of there. The patriot fights, with or without a uniform, whether or not the reinforcements arrive, even if it looks like he will lose.

The patriot fights to the death, because for the patriot the cause is more important than life itself, the cause is everything, the cause is sufficient.

Paul's message to the Colossians: the cause is Christ and Christ is sufficient. He is more than enough. What you gain with Christ you cannot lose. Anything you lose because of Christ is not as important. That's what it means to be a Christ centered people. In the words of missionary Jim Elliott. "He is no fool who gives what he cannot keep to gain what he cannot lose." Christ centered people can give up everything, except Christ. To have him, even if he is all we have, is sufficient.